

SB 12: Provide Funding to Educate 19-Year-Olds

What SB 12 does:

This bill amends the definition of “pupil” to include students, who are 19 years of age or older and admitted to a school at the discretion of the trustees, in the Average Number Belonging (ANB) calculations.

Why we need SB 12:

In the 2013-2014 school year, 78 students 19 years of age or older were enrolled in October, 72 were enrolled in December, and 64 were enrolled in February. For some students, it can take more than four years to earn their high school diploma, yet schools do not receive any state funding to educate 19-year-olds.



From the class of 2013, an additional 169 students graduated in 2014, making the five-year graduation rate 85.8 percent. Currently, Montana is the only state in the nation that cuts off school funding when a student turns nineteen.¹ The majority of states fund students until they are 21 years of age, including all of Montana’s neighboring states (ID, WY, ND, SD).² In today’s global economy, a student needs *at minimum* a high school diploma to find a decent-paying job, and Montana cannot afford to discourage local schools’ efforts to graduate every student.

Educating Montana’s 19-year-old students makes sense:

- **Students who need a “5th year” or an extra semester of high school are often highly motivated to graduate** and need the extra time to earn core credits, have transferred from a school system that makes them a “late start” in Montana’s school system, or dropped out of school due to family circumstances and have reenrolled in high school to earn their diploma.
- Montana schools that receive funding for students who are age 19 or older **will be able to broaden their efforts for student success**, which may include more flexible scheduling (such as night time and weekend courses) to support students who have family obligations or employment responsibilities.
- **Investing in student success while they are still enrolled in school** makes sense, as the number of students who drop out and say they will pursue a GED is much higher than the number of students who actually receive a GED. The wages and tax contributions of a high school graduate are substantially higher over the life time of a graduate compared to a high school dropout.³

SB 12 is a critical piece of a comprehensive, statewide strategy:

Graduation Matters Montana consists of forty-eight locally-designed initiatives that engage schools, communities, businesses and families in a focused effort to increase the number of students who graduate prepared for college and careers. More than seventy-five percent of Montana students currently attend a school with a Graduation Matters initiative. Since launching Graduation Matters Montana, our high school dropout rate has declined from 5.1 percent to 3.7 percent and the graduation rate has increased from 80.7 percent to 85.4 percent. SB 12 would provide communities with another strategy to build on the successes of the past two years.

Prepared by the Office of Public Instruction, January 2015

¹ Education Commission of the States. *Student Accountability Initiatives: Upper Statutory Ages*.

² Education Commission of the States, 50 State Analysis: School Attendance Age Limits

³ Alliance for Excellent Education.